

Study Guide for *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

This study guide is designed to help you review important parts of the text and understand the format of the exam. The test will be on Tues. Jan. 17. You may use both blocks to complete the test.

Part I - The first section of the test will be matching the names of characters, places and concepts from the book with significant information about each. There will be fifteen questions worth one point each.

Matching Examples (15 points total)

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| _____ 1. Umofia | a. The woman who might have died if Okonkwo had been a better shot |
| _____ 2. The egwugwu | b. The village Okonkwo called home |
| _____ 3. Ekwefi | c. Men who represent ancestral spirits |

Part II - The second portion of the test will be short answer. Each question will be worth two points each. Be sure to write in complete sentences to receive full credit.

Short Answer Questions Examples (20 points total)

1. Why did children especially like moonlit nights?
2. Why were Okonkwo and his family exiled for seven years?
3. Why couldn't Okonkwo's friends and family bury him?

Part III - The third and final part of the test will be essay. Two of the following questions will be on the essay portion of the test. You will choose one and write an essay answering all parts of the question using appropriate references from the book and concise analysis. Part III of the test is worth (25 points total).

1. Achebe takes the title for his novel from a line in a classic Western modernist poem "The Second Coming" (wr. 1919; pub. 1921), by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939; Irish). Paul Brians explains the background of Yeats' poem: "Yeats was attracted to the spiritual and occult world and fashioned for himself an elaborate mythology to explain human experience. 'The Second Coming,' written after the catastrophe of World War I and with communism and fascism rising, is a compelling glimpse of an inhuman world about to be born. Yeats believed that history in part moved in two thousand-year cycles. The Christian era, which followed that of the ancient world, was about to give way to an ominous period represented by the rough, pitiless beast in the poem." Read "The Second Coming" (below) and consider why Achebe might choose to take the title of his novel from Yeats' poem. Consider how Achebe's literary **allusion** to Yeats' poem might deepen or extend—by comparison and/or contrast—the meaning(s) of Achebe's title and his novel.

THE SECOND COMING

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

2. What do we learn from the kola ceremony of hospitality? Paul Brians explains, "Kola is a mild stimulant, comparable to tea or coffee, which is served on most social occasions in this culture. It is also one ingredient after which Coca-Cola is named. Note how the ritual for sharing kola is described without being explained." Palm-wine is a naturally fermented product of the palm-wine tree, a sort of natural beer. How is awareness of rank observed in the drinking of the palm wine? Note how Achebe introduces—but does not fully explain—Igbo customs, rituals, and ceremonies in the novel. Think about why Achebe chooses to do this, considering that he wrote for an international non-African audience as well as his own peoples.
3. Even as Achebe works to educate his readers about African culture and to combat demeaning stereotypes, he does not present Igbo society as ideal or perfect. The portrait of this culture on the eve of its "falling apart" in Part I of *Things Fall Apart* is complex, sometimes contradictory and critical. What aspects of pre-colonial Igbo culture does Achebe seem to question or criticize? How does Achebe use characters like Obierika, Okonkwo, and Nwoye to offer such social criticism of Igbo society? How do the people of Umuofia react to change?